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STATE HEALTH COMMISSIONER ANNOUNCES FIRST INFLUENZA DEATH

INDIANAPOLIS—State Health Commissioner Gregory N. Larkin, M.D. reported today Indiana has had its first influenza (flu) death of the 2010-2011 flu season. State health officials say they will not be releasing any additional information about the individual.

"This is a sad reminder influenza can be very serious and even deadly," said Dr. Larkin. "Our sympathies go out to the family of this individual for their loss; especially so close to the holidays."

"The best defense against influenza is to get vaccinated, and everyone over 6 months of age should get the flu vaccine each year," said Dr. Larkin. "In addition, individuals should be sure to practice frequent, thorough hand washing and avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth. When possible, of course, they should stay away from known infected persons."

Influenza or the "the flu" is a viral infection of the respiratory tract. Influenza is spread by respiratory droplets from close contact with infected persons or contact with contaminated surfaces or objects. Infection can occur when influenza viruses contact the eyes, mouth, or nose, and possibly through inhaling droplets from a sneeze or cough. Sometimes people may become infected by touching surfaces or objects contaminated with influenza viruses and then touching their eyes, mouth, or nose.

Symptoms of the flu include:

- fever 100 degrees Fahrenheit, or greater
- headache
- fatigue
- cough
- muscle aches
- sore throat

Although anyone can get the flu, some people are at higher risk of complications related to the flu, including hospitalization and death. High risk individuals include pregnant women, young children (especially those too young to get vaccinated), people with chronic illnesses and/or compromised immune systems, and the elderly.

For more information on influenza and the seasonal flu vaccine, visit www.in.gov/flu. Stay up-to-date on the latest flu information by following the Indiana State Department of Health on Twitter at: www.twitter.com/INPublicHealth.

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